

Commission Comments
Enhanced 9-1-1 Update: April 2006

Madison County, along with numerous other counties in the State of Montana, has been working for the past several years to improve the conditions by which local emergency service providers can more quickly and accurately respond to 911 calls for help. In our efforts to upgrade the County's emergency response system to "Enhanced" status, we are following a State-approved E911 plan. We are also following the State of Montana Addressing Guidebook for Local Governments.

We recently sent out official 911 physical address notices to over 1200 rural route postal customers in Madison County. Approximately 800 households and businesses had their current address confirmed, with no change needed. However, 400 postal customers received news that they have been assigned a new address, and they have one year to complete the transition from old address to new.

Several people have questioned why the mailing address and physical address of rural route postal customers must be the same. The Guidebook states the following: "A community should establish a **single** locatable addressing system that can be adopted for all addressing purposes, including emergency services, mail delivery, private delivery services, municipal records, and utilities. **Ideally, there should be one address per dwelling that can be used for all purposes. Having more than one address can confuse a caller when confirming a location in an emergency, and can also confuse those who are responding to the emergency...**"

The Guidebook goes on to recommend a particular type of addressing system, known as a frontage interval system. "This system is based on the distance of a structure from a designated road beginning, usually an intersection. Once the 'starting point' is determined, where the numbers begin to ascend, a standard interval in feet is used to assign consecutive property numbers along a street, regardless of whether a building is there or not...**With the coming of Enhanced 9-1-1 service, it is recommended that rural route addresses be changed to physical addresses to better locate dwellings in an emergency. To avoid confusion, it is important that the physical address also be used for mail delivery.**"

Over the past few decades, several different entities took the initiative to assign physical addresses in Madison County. Utility companies, local postmasters, and county commissioners all participated in creating an addressing puzzle that has led to significant confusion and delays for emergency service providers, telephone and power companies, and delivery services, etc. Many folks have never had a physical address. In some neighborhoods, residents simply adopted their lot numbers as their physical address, even though a platted lot number has no relation to actual physical location. New residents are especially difficult to locate, and new emergency service personnel/volunteers have a very hard time responding to 911 calls.

In 2002, the Madison County Board of County Commissioners issued a Request for Proposals for a consulting firm to work with County staff on designing and implementing a consistent rural addressing and E911 system. We chose Jere Folgert of Global Positions, Inc. for the job. We have been pleased by Jere's diligence and commitment to this enormous, complex project.

Once Madison County has achieved Enhanced 911 status for landline telephones, our next step will be to upgrade the emergency response system for wireless 911 calls.

We hope this column answers some of your questions about the E911 project. We understand that Madison County's move to Enhanced 911 involves some inconvenience for many local residents and even some moderate expense for several local businesses. However, if two minutes can save someone's life, making that effort to reduce the potential for confusion and delay is well worth the effort.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Prepared for the Board of Commissioners by Doris Fischer.